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**'The lights of the electric octopus have been switched off':
visual and political culture in Edwardian London**

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Review

**‘The lights of the electric octopus have been switched off’: visual and political culture in
Edwardian London**

Abstract

This article reconstructs the visual culture of politics in Edwardian London through a study of the 1907 London County Council election. It moves beyond the memorable account given in Graham Wallas’s *Human Nature in Politics* to examine the actors, especially associations and newspapers, that participated in the election. Drawing upon newspapers, election addresses, cartoon, leaflets and posters, the article argues that Edwardian London was a prime site in the application of new media for political communication. It shows, however, that new modes of communication could co-exist with, and intensify, established forms of public politics. It reveals a highly knowing visual culture of politics through which issues of authenticity and identity were contested, and recasts understanding of a controversial and critical election.

Keywords: London; visual culture; politics; media

In 1908 one of the defeated Progressive candidates for Hoxton in the last London County Council election published his second book. The realities of electioneering were central to Graham Wallas’s study of *Human Nature in Politics*.¹ His first readers recognised the element of life writing in his magnum opus: Sidney Webb observed that ‘everyone who writes or lectures on Politics ought to have been a candidate in a big town’.² Historians have acknowledged Wallas’s use of his political education to impart the ‘concreteness and the humour’ that William James found ‘characteristically English’, while noting that his book

¹ Graham Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics* (London, 1908).

² London School of Economics, Graham Wallas Papers, 1/38, Letter from Sidney Webb, 23 July 1908.

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3 was the product of years of thinking about mass politics.³ Wallas certainly drew upon his
4
5 lengthy involvement in and study of local politics, but the degree to which his work was
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7 specifically informed by the 1907 election has been underestimated.⁴ Central themes in the
8
9 text - the power of repetition, the preoccupation with 'branding', the potency attributed to
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11 visual propaganda - are clarified when the circumstances of its composition are properly
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13 recalled.⁵ *Human Nature in Politics* was very much a London book. It offered a brilliantly
14
15 suggestive vision of metropolitan picture politics that has proved lastingly influential. This
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17 vision was, though, partial, and coloured by the experience of electoral defeat. By revisiting
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19 the 1907 election, this article recasts our understanding of visual and political culture in
20
21 Edwardian London, moving beyond Wallas's seminal study.
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26 The article argues that Edwardian London was a prime site in the application of new
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28 media for political communication. Historians have tended to see municipal elections as less
29
30 innovative than their Westminster counterparts, but in 1907 campaigners drew upon the full
31
32 range of visual media from film to posters and lantern slides. There was a striking coherence
33
34 to the messaging of the political right especially that anticipated the supposed discoveries of
35
36 later national election campaigns, and made a local election national news. This embrace of
37
38 new media was, not, however, at the expense of established modes of electioneering. On the
39
40 contrary, the insertion of cinema, phonographs and lantern slides into public meetings both in
41
42 and out of doors was wholly compatible with, and could provoke, vivid expressions of the
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44 politics of disruption. Accusations of 'Americanisation' were freely dispensed by participants
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50 ³ LSE, Wallas Paper, 1/38, Letter from William James, 9 December 1908; Peter Clarke, *Liberals and Social*
51 *Democrats* (Cambridge, 1978), 135.

52 ⁴ Asa Briggs recognised the significance of 1907 in 'Evidence of the Centre for Environmental Studies', Royal
53 Commission on Local Government in Greater London, 1959, reprinted in Andrew Saint (ed.) *Politics and The*
54 *People of London: The London County Council 1889-1965* (London, 1989), 268; Terence H. Qualter, *Graham*
55 *Wallas and the Great Society* (London, 1980), 75-6.

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57 ⁵ Wallas, *Human Nature*, 59-113.
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in the election with frequent reference to campaigning methods, especially the use of forceful pictorial publicity. Questions of probity and authenticity were central to much of the visual propaganda of 1907. Both sides accused the other of dishonesty, and of not being what they seemed. Cartoons and posters flattered the viewer as seeing through such trickery, enlisting the voter in a community of the knowing - a kind of political equivalent to the conspiracies of meaning detected by Peter Bailey in music hall - and presenting the imagery and its producers as agents of truth rather than partisan dissemblers.⁶ This approach to image-making, with its frequent depictions of pictures within pictures, both acknowledged and sought to transcend the growing reputation of visual publicity as untrustworthy, not least by casting the viewer as active and informed.⁷ It was a form of visual politics appropriate to the time and the place in which music hall attained its greatest popularity.⁸

In their turn to the politics of place, modern British historians have paid less attention than one might expect to the municipal arena.⁹ The politics of the LCC operated on three interacting levels: London-wide, London-local, and national. Its remit as a body for London as a whole both reflected and fostered a conception of the capital as a unity, and the political project of Progressivism from 1889 was fundamentally concerned to create a sense, much invoked in 1907, of civic patriotism. The forces of the right in London were much less enamoured of this integrated, city-wide vision; but their very scepticism, like their championing in 1907 of borough councils, directed attention to the importance of the existing

⁶ Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge, 1998), 133, 137.

⁷ On pictures within pictures, see W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago, 1994), 35-83.

⁸ Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance*, 140.

⁹ Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), 226-40; D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918* (Cambridge, 1991); Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor (eds), *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1820* (Aldershot, 1997); Alex Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism in Imperial London, 1868-1906* (Woodbridge, 2007), 129-63.

machinery of London-wide governance.¹⁰ LCC elections were fought across 58 constituencies of widely varying character. As the electoral addresses of 1907 testify, candidates could appeal to voters on their credentials as local men of their districts. LCC elections also had a national dimension. In part, this exemplified broader trends, as urban and national politics increasingly overlapped, linked by demographic change, the rise of social issues, and problems of taxation and expenditure.¹¹ However, the LCC received a level of attention in the media denied to other county councils. This reflected the sheer, and growing, scale of late Victorian and Edwardian London, but also the capacity of LCC elections to deliver newsworthy controversy and attract established political names.¹² The Liberals' General Election landslide of 1906 further elevated the LCC's profile by bringing a number of councillors into the House of Commons so raising the possibility of a radical alliance between central and local government at a moment of intense party competition.¹³

The 1907 LCC election was a focal moment in the development of political communication in Edwardian England. As Ken Young noted forty years ago, an

¹⁰ Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism*, 155.

¹¹ J. Harris, 'The Transition to High Politics in English Social Policy' in Michael Bentley and John Stevenson (eds.), *High and Low Politics in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 1983), 58-79; E. H. H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism: The Politics, Economics and Ideology of the Conservative Party, 1880-1914* (London, 1995), 27-59; Avner Offer, *Property and Politics: Landownership, Law, Ideology and urban development in England* (Cambridge, 1981), 201-220; Philip Waller, *Town, city and nation: England 1850-1914* (Oxford, 1983), 22; Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London, 1963), 323-25.

¹² J. D. Dunbabin, 'Expectations of the new County Councils, and their Realization', *Historical Journal*, 8 (1965), 375; John Lee, *Social Leaders and Public Persons: A Study of the County Government in Cheshire since 1888* (Oxford, 1963), 2; G. R. Searle, *A New England? Peace and War, 1886-1918* (Oxford, 2004), 226; P. J. Waller, *Town, City and Nation*, 289; John Davis, 'The Progressive Council, 1889-1907' in Saint (ed.), *Politics and the People of London*, 30; David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven, 1990), 560.

¹³ Paul Readman and Luke Blaxill, 'Edwardian By-elections', in T. G. Otte and Paul Readman (eds.), *By-elections in British Politics, 1832-1914* (Woodbridge, 2013), 231; Jon Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford, 2009), 70-74; George W. Jones, *Borough Politics: A Study of Wolverhampton Town Council, 1888-1924* (London, 1969), 29-52.

extraordinary volume of publicity was produced in 1907, not least 369,000 posters by the (Conservative) London Municipal Society alone.¹⁴ Recent legal decisions had expanded the electorate, and turnout, while lower than in Westminster elections, was unusually high by municipal standards.¹⁵ Importantly, the electorate included about 100,000 women, so 1907 provides a rare pre-war instance in which the full panoply of electioneering methods from leaflets to cinematographs was directed at a gender mixed audience. Prognostications, usually bereft of hard evidence, about the behaviour of female electors were a common feature of the post-match analysis, and were to have a lasting impact.

This article is organized in four parts. It starts with the existing historiography. As both a critical and a controversial election 1907 has not lacked for students. The literature has, however, tended to concentrate on the political organizations of either side rather than to examine the full range of actors. The role of newspapers especially in the election has been under-examined.¹⁶ Where historians have looked at the campaign more broadly, it has generally been as an instance of a ratepayers' revolt or as an episode in the history of anti-socialism, rather than for what it can tell us about the character of visual and political culture in Edwardian London. The next part takes up this question. The use of large, pictorial posters, film and phonographs, along with repetitive newspaper coverage, was identified as both new and 'American'. This section argues that this emphasis upon novelty and transatlantic imitation was overstated and misleading.¹⁷ Rather, the campaign was characterised by the co-

¹⁴Ken Young, *Local Politics and the Rise of Party: The London Municipal Society and the Conservative Intervention in Local Elections 1894-1963* (Leicester, 1975), 93; Ioan Gibbon and Reginald Bell, *History of the London County Council, 1889-1939* (London, 1939), 103.

¹⁵ On the comparable intensity of LCC and parliamentary elections from a candidate's perspective, James Stuart, *Reminiscences* (London, 1911), 233.

¹⁶ The 1889 and 1934 LCC elections do feature in Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain* (London, 1990), 308, 963; Alan J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press, 1885-1914* (London, 1976), 131-213.

¹⁷ James Thompson, "'Pictorial Lies?': Posters and Politics in Britain, 1880-1914", *Past and Present*, 197

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3 existence, and inter-relationship of ‘old’ and ‘new’ media, often combined in efforts to
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5 persuade electors, conceived as active participants in the construction of meaning and the
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7 creation of political communities. Contested relationships between word and image,
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9 proliferation of images across different media, and allusions to other images, were prominent
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11 features. Tracing the visual culture of the election reveals the development of key narratives,
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13 and the accretion of significance through a succession of inter-linked images. The role of
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15 particular cartoonists, notably Edward Huskinson and David Wilson, helped lend coherence
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17 to this messaging.
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21 The third part examines the politics of naming that was central to the election. The
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23 efforts of the political right to rebrand themselves as ‘Municipal Reformers’ were fiercely
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25 resisted by the left whom the right in turn accused of masking its socialist profligacy under
26
27 the false banner of the ‘Progressives’. This struggle over meaning was equally evident in the
28
29 heated argument over London’s electricity supply in which both sides charged the other with
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31 hiding their intent of creating a Trust. The Trust dispute raised the spectre of ‘Tammany Hall’
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33 big city bribery and corruption, and here too claims of Americanisation were freely made, not
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35 least with respect to electioneering techniques.¹⁸ Finally, the article reflects on how the
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37 election was, and should be, interpreted. It examines how contemporaries explained the
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39 outcome, the ‘lessons learnt’ for future campaigning, and returns to the significance of 1907
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41 for our understanding of the relationship between visual and political culture in Edwardian
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(November 2007), 177-210.

¹⁸ The term ‘Tammany Hall’ referred directly to the Democratic Party machine that dominated New York city and state politics through its patronage networks, but was used more loosely in Britain to invoke big city political corruption through party organization.

As local elections go, the London County Council election of March 1907 borders upon the well known. On a record turnout of 55%, the broad left Progressive majority that had dominated London politics since 1889 was swept away, as the right of centre Municipal Reformers triumphed. A council composed of 83 Progressives, 34 Moderates and 1 Independent was replaced by one consisting of 79 Municipal Reformers, 38 Progressives and 1 Independent, inaugurating an era of Conservative rule that would last until the Labour victory of 1934.

Unsurprisingly, explaining the success of the Municipal Reformers has been a prime concern in the historiography. The dominant interpretation has emphasised voter unhappiness over high rates at a time when inflation was squeezing incomes.¹⁹ This view was influentially articulated in Avner Offer's study of property and politics which argued that the weakness of the rental market from 1905 exacerbated the burden on ratepayers, while in an important essay on Progressives rule John Davis stressed the impact of rises in the cost of living, comparing 1907 to 1919-20 and the mid-1970s.²⁰ This approach focuses on the travails of the middle-class ratepayer, whose sufferings were loudly proclaimed in the contemporary press.²¹ In his ground-breaking study of London politics, Paul Thompson acknowledged the impact of divisions on the left leading to three-way contests and the alienation of nonconformists consequent upon the Council's handling of the education issue. Strikingly, Thompson laid particular emphasis upon the success of Conservative publicity in fostering 'mass revolt'

¹⁹ Paul Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour: The Struggle for London, 1885-1914* (London, 1967), 180; Offer, *Property and Politics*, 307; Waller, *Town, City and Nation*, 62; Searle, *A New England?*, 227; Roland Quinault, 'London and the Land Question, c. 1880-1914', in Matthew Cragoe and Paul Readman (eds), *The Land Question in Britain, 1750-1950* (Basingstoke, 2010), 174; Davis, 'The Progressive Council', 44-5; David Thackeray, *Conservatism for the Democratic Age: Conservative Cultures and the Challenge of Mass Politics in Twentieth Century England* (Manchester, 2013), 56.

²⁰ Offer, *Property and Politics*, 307, 290-92; Davis, 'The Progressive Council', 44-5.

²¹ Philip Waller, 'Altercation Over Civil Society: The Bitter Cry of the Edwardian Middle Classes', in Jose Harris (ed.), *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford, 2003), p. 115-34.

among ratepayers, and convincing previous non-voters, especially women, to vote.²² Offer too attributed some importance to the campaign waged against the Progressives.²³ Yet we lack much by way of systematic, comparative analysis of the propaganda of 1907 within the literature of London history. In some respects, Ken Young's 1975 account remains that most attentive to the diversity of Edwardian political communication.²⁴

The gulf in performance of the right between Westminster and LCC elections has long struck historians.²⁵ Most commonly, it was proposed that municipal and parliamentary elections revolved around different questions, and that the first were not seen as 'political' (or not at least as 'party political') in the sense that the second were.²⁶ More recently, Alex Windscheffel has importantly advanced our understanding of the dynamics of metropolitan politics. Windscheffel stresses the right's failure to renovate its vision for London after the creation of the LCC bypassed the 'tenification' proposals of the 1880s.²⁷ His demonstration of the creativity of London Conservatism in the parliamentary arena renders its municipal performance odder, and raises important questions as to why it was able to break through when it did. Like much of the literature, however, Windscheffel's focus is upon one side of the party political divide. A fuller understanding of 1907, and of LCC electoral politics more broadly, requires a more comparative approach.

²² Thompson, *Socialist, Liberals and Labour*, 180-82. The ferocity of the campaign is also noted in Susan Pennybacker, "'The Millenium By Return of Post': Reconsidering London Progressivism, 1889-1907" in David Feldman and Gareth Stedman Jones (eds.), *Metropolis London* (London, 1989), 150. On the political role of elite women in Conservative politics, Jonathan Schneer, *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis* (New Haven, 1999), 119-62.

²³ Offer, *Property and Politics*, 304-5.

²⁴ Young, *London Politics*, 93-5.

²⁵ James Cornford, 'The Transformation of Conservatism in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Victorian Studies*, 7 (1963), 37, 59; Henry Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910* (London, 1967), 26-60.

²⁶ Jon Davis, *Reforming London: The London Government Problem, 1855-1900* (Oxford, 1988), 188-90.

²⁷ 'Tenification' referred to schemes to create multiple municipal authorities within London; Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism*, 155.

Outside the work of London historians, the 1907 election has had a walk on part in writing on anti-socialism.²⁸ This is unsurprising, given the intense efforts of the deeply anti-socialist London Municipal Society in 1907, and in the borough elections of November 1906. J. N. Peters provides one of the best descriptions of the 1907 campaign, noting its virulence and the preoccupation with the politics of naming.²⁹ The networks of metropolitan anti-socialism were mobilised against progressivism in 1907, with the *Property Owner's Journal* rivalling the *Municipal Reform Gazette* in its devotion to the cause. However, the anti-socialist message was scarcely new in LCC politics: The right-wing satirical journal *Judy* was already claiming in 1898 that the 'Progressive programme means Socialism; it means the insertion of the thin edge of the wedge of Communism'. As in 1907, anti-socialism functioned in 1898 as a catch-all, purportedly unifying a medley of complaints, well encapsulated in *Judy's* excited charge that Progressive success would render the LCC 'a Tammany Hall, a stable of hobby-horses, a nest of faddists, theorists, agitators, strike-mongers, and adventurers'.³⁰ Charting the ideology of anti-socialism reveals continuities in content that contrast with its chequered performance at the ballot box. We need, therefore, to

²⁸ Jules Philip Gehrke, 'Municipal Anti-Socialism and the Growth of the Anti-Socialist Critique in Britain, 1873-1914, PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 2006; James Peters, 'Anti-Socialism in British Politics, 1900-1922', DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1992; Kenneth D. Brown, 'The Anti-Socialist Union, 1908-49', in Kenneth D. Brown (ed.), *Essays in Anti-Labour History: Responses to the Rise of Labour in Britain* (London, 1974), 234-61; N. Soldon, 'Laissez-faire as Dogma: The Liberty and Property Defence League, 1882-1914', in Brown, *Essays in Anti-Labour History*, 231; E. J. Bristow, 'The Liberty and Property Defence League and Individualism', *Historical Journal*, 18 (1975), 761-789; E. J. Bristow, *Individualism Versus Socialism in Britain, 1880-1914* (New York, 1987), 326-30. On the longer history of 'progressive' as a label, Emily Robinson, 'Defining Progressive Politics: Municipal Socialism and Anti-Socialism in Contestation, 1889-1939', *Journal of the History*, 76 (2015), 609-31.

²⁹ Peters, 'Anti-Socialism in British Politics'.

³⁰ *Judy*, 13 February 1898.

consider the context of 1907, and especially how political messages were conveyed in that context. It is to the visual and political culture of Edwardian London that we now turn.³¹

III.

Looking back at the 1907 election, Wallas observed that ‘there appeared on the London hoardings thousands of posters which were intended to create a belief that the Progressive members on the Council made their personal livelihood by defrauding ratepayers’. He remarked that ‘the person represented was, if judged by the shape of his hat, the fashion of his watch-chain, the neglected condition of his teeth, and the redness of his nose, obviously a professional sharper. He was, I believe, drawn by an American artist, and his face and clothes had a vaguely American appearance, which, in the region of sub-conscious association, further suggested to most onlookers the idea of Tammany Hall’.

Wallas was referring to Edward Huskinson’s poster ‘It’s Your Money We Want’, and suggested it had been ‘brilliantly successful’ [fig.1].³²

³¹ On the need for further work on ‘the methods employed by political parties’ in London, see Cragoe and Taylor, *London Politics*, 240.

³² Wallas, *Human Nature*, 108-110; *A collection of L.C.C. election addresses issued by the Municipal Reform, Progressive and Labour parties* (London: The Parties, 1892-1937), by permission of Guildhall Library, City of London.



Described by the *Daily News* as ‘that hideous head that looked at them from every hoarding’, one election post-mortem claimed it was on ‘numberless hoardings’, while *The Tribune* designated it ‘the principal poster with which the Moderate party has been defacing the hoardings of London’.³³ The image was revived in the 1910 LCC election, complete with the tagline ‘It’s Still Your Money We Want’. In 1912 T. Swinburne Sheldrake claimed that ‘we are all agreed that poster had a very marked effect on the polls’.³⁴ The secondary literature on the election has long upheld its importance.³⁵

³³ *The Tribune*, 4 March 1907.

³⁴ *Printer’s Ink* (May 1912), 106-7; for subsequent borrowing, see the cartoon ‘No effects’, *Punch*, 26 March 1913; and the poster, G. R. Halkett, ‘John Bull’s Quack Doctors’.

³⁵ A. G. Gardiner, *John Bann and the Progressive Movement* (London, 1925), 356; Young, *Local Politics*, 93; Offer, *Property*, 304-5.

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3 The poster's status on the left, exemplified by Wallas's account, as a visual
4
5 embodiment of the Americanisation of right-wing electioneering, was established by the end
6
7 of the campaign.³⁶ However, as Wallas himself recognised, the image did not go uncontested.
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9 Chairing a meeting of North Islington Progressives, the Reverend N. C. T. Parker drew
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11 laughter with his comments on 'the picture that haunted one on the streets of London'.
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13 Suggesting 'it was like putting Gladstone's hat on the Duke of Norfolk', he 'criticised, amid
14
15 great laughter, the big hat, and likened it to the Tories, who tried to imitate the Liberals'.³⁷
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17 *The Tribune* mordantly commented that 'in our reproduction the misleading label has come
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19 off the hat', before warning that 'ratepayers will have no reason to question whom the poster
20
21 really represents. He has got your votes'. Progressive use of Huskinson's personification to
22
23 attack 'the Moderates' during (and after) the campaign - apparent, for instance, in Arthur
24
25 Moreland's *Morning Leader* cartoons - confirms its currency, and suggests the extent of its
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27 re-appropriation in the contested visual culture of Edwardian politics.
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33 The poster's association with Americanisation had several sources. The central figure
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35 - with its echoes of Thomas Nast's anti-Tammany Hall cartoons of Boss Tweed in *Harper's*
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37 *Weekly* - was widely read as 'American', extrapolating from his disreputable appearance, and
38
39 the 'loud' style of his clothes. This figure has been regarded - understandably - as
40
41 stereotypically Jewish by historians.³⁸ While it is entirely possible this interpretation was
42
43 current at the time, there is little corroborating evidence, and the anti-Semitic cartooning that
44
45 accompanied the agitation for the Aliens Act a few years earlier pictured a long-haired,
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47 'Fagin', stereotype. The direct gaze out of the picture frame, and the pointing figure, are
48
49 difficult for modern viewers to disentangle from Alfred Leete's Kitchener recruitment
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56 ³⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 4 July 1907; *The Nation*, 9 March 1907.

57 ³⁷ *Islington Daily Gazette*, 19 February 1907.

58 ³⁸ Offer, *Property and Politics*; Thackeray, *Conservatism*, 53.

poster.³⁹ Perhaps tellingly, Leete later designed a poster incorporating a staring Bolshevik, and the slogan ‘It’s Your Money He Wants’ as part of the Conservatives’ 1924 election campaign.⁴⁰ The ‘American’ qualities of Huskinson’s poster also rested in the idea that its brash appeal - even a sympathiser described it as ‘glaringly ugly’ - was borrowed from advertising, a notion not confined to progressive publicity.

Although Wallas’s account of the poster was thus rooted in contemporary reactions, its invocation as an emblem of an Americanised, commercially debased political culture is problematic. The history of the design itself is suggestive. As Gardiner noted, the poster itself reworked an illustration from a satire on the pro-tory Northcliffe press.⁴¹ Embedded in a web of imagery, it depended for its meaning upon easily alterable words, as *The Tribune*’s pastiche recognised. Born in Nottinghamshire, Huskinson was a rising star of Conservative cartooning, who became editor of *Tatler* in 1908.⁴² The majority of his posters in 1907 began life as newspaper cartoons, usually in the *Municipal Reform Gazette*. In many ways, ‘It’s Your Money’ was atypical of his work. Reflecting the heritage of the political cartoon, denser pictorial argument and a richer interplay between word and image characterised his output as a whole. At times, longstanding conventions of political cartooning were especially prominent, as in his almost-eighteenth century summary of the Municipal Reform case that high rates beggared all [fig. 2].⁴³

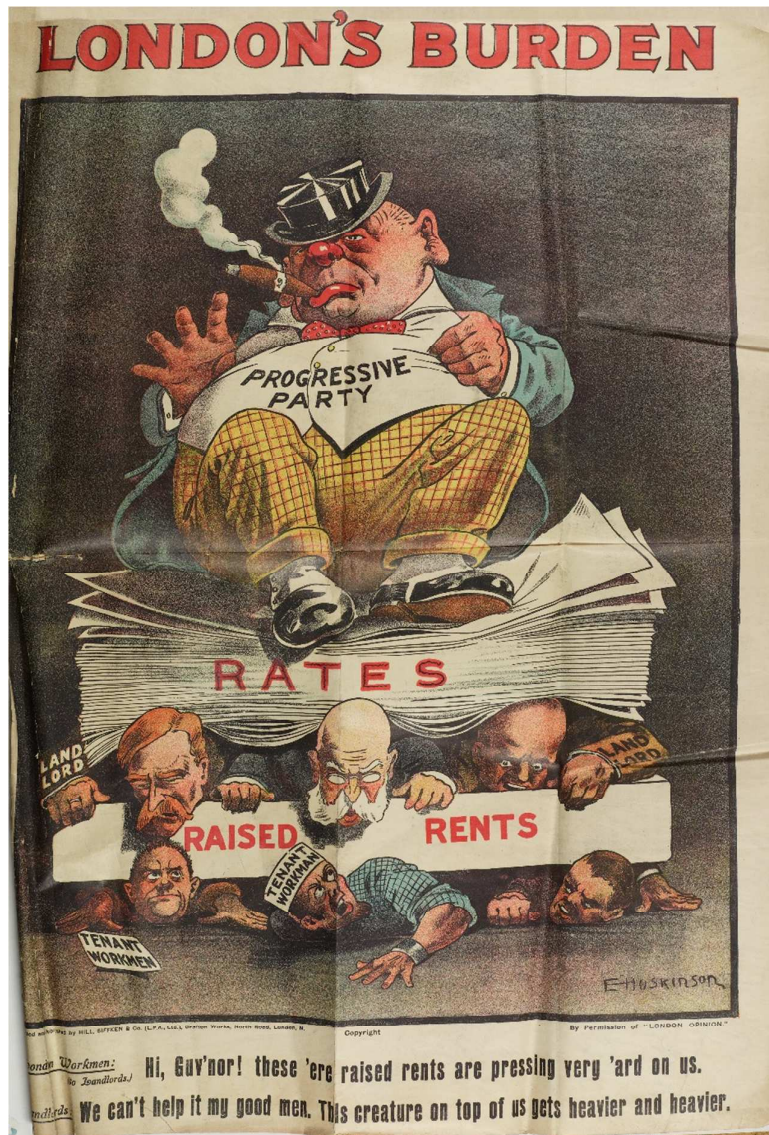
³⁹ James Thompson, ‘Posters, Advertising and the First World War’ in Ann-Marie Einhaus and Katherine Isobel Baxter (eds), *The Edinburgh Companion to the First World War and the Arts* (Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming).

⁴⁰ Beers, *Your Britain*, 60.

⁴¹ Gardiner, *Benn*, 356.

⁴² *The Times*, 19 November 1941.

⁴³ *A collection of L.C.C. election addresses issued by the Municipal Reform, Progressive and Labour parties*, London: The Parties, 1892-1937, by permission of Guildhall Library, City of London.



His use of animals was also squarely in this tradition, as was the creation of linking pictorial devices - notably the shiny top hat - through which images referenced each other, accruing meaning. In discussing the lessons of advertising for elections, Jessel - often presented by

critics as the controlling mind behind the LMS campaign - stressed the political poster's role in making arguments and telling stories, suggesting that 'the political poster at election time is more likely to be studied than an ordinary commercial bill'.⁴⁴

Commentators on the election often grouped gramophones with posters. A correspondent to the Islington local press complained of 'these terrible cartoons and gramophones'.⁴⁵ Coverage stressing the 'modernity' of the election pictured gramophones, alongside posters and motor cars. It is clear that Municipal Reformers made extensive use of gramophones to play both speeches and music. This practice was, however, usually integrated into established and valued modes of campaigning. A Municipal Reform rally at the Islington Cattle Market featured a 'display of dissolving views' outside with a gramophone concert in the hall. Gramophone concerts often preceded speeches at Municipal Reform meetings, supplying 'popular songs and parodies'.⁴⁶ The *South London Press* noted that 'Municipal Reformers have enlisted the services of gramophones into the election campaign, and certainly the tabloid music is far more entertaining than some of the speeches which follow', before concluding 'it is magnificent, but it is not politics!'. Reporting a Municipal Reform meeting in Brixton, the paper observed that 'there was more harmony in the gramophone than in the speechmaking proceedings', insisting 'that all present were not Moderates' and that the customary resolution was not, contrary to the claims from the platform, actually carried.⁴⁷

As with the gramophone, lantern slides and cinematographs were incorporated into public meetings. Advertised through the press, illustrated lectures typically lasted about an hour, and could be followed by speeches from candidates. Will Crook's biographer, George

⁴⁴ *Printer's Ink* (May 1912), 109.

⁴⁵ *Islington Daily Gazette*, 28 February 1907.

⁴⁶ *Islington Daily Gazette*, 15 February 1907; *Islington Daily Gazette*, 20 February 1907.

⁴⁷ *South London Press*, 9 February 1907; *South London Press*, 16 February 1907.

Haw, scripted the *Daily News*'s contribution. The opening picture was of County Hall in Spring Gardens rapidly contrasted with grander municipal buildings in Britain, France and Belgium, followed by a *Daily News*' artist's mock-up of the County Council's intended new home. Through images and words, the lecture emphasised London's scale, and the necessity and grandeur of the Council's work. In their fight to protect the weak from 'wrong-doing', London's progressive leaders were favourably compared to the Knights of the Round Table. The battle was against 'slumdom, fraudulent trading, disease, overcrowding, immorality, jobbery, sweating and that deadliest enemy of all - monopoly'. The horrors of trusts were conveyed through cartoon and song, driving home the message that 'the only name that fittingly describes the Moderates is the Trust party'. Photographs of leading progressives served to personify the cause, and to associate progressive rule with the parks, gardens, trams, steamboats, training centres, and fire engines photographs of which were also displayed. By contrast, Municipal Reformers appeared solely through caricature. The initial images of buildings and politicians were succeeded by more familiar, but also evocative, subjects - coal and loaves - to illustrate 'The LCC in the Home'. Seeking to domesticate progressivism with an awareness of women voters, a portrait of a progressive councillor was accompanied with the assurance that 'the LCC sits down at table with them, and gathers with them round the family hearth' not 'intrusively, as the enemies of Progressive government would have you believe' but 'in a way that appeals to every housewife sympathetically'. The lecture's focus on defending the Progressive's record reflected the challenges of campaigning after 18 years in power, and in less than ideal economic circumstances. It finished with pictures of flames, and of fire engines setting out, providing a visual tie between County Hall and the home, between Progressivism and the people's health.⁴⁸ Its invocation of the gains from

⁴⁸ George Haw, "The *Daily News*" *Lantern Lecture* (London, 1907).

progressivism, and the potential material losses from Moderate rule, contained an implicit class-based defence of redistribution.

Delivering the *Daily News* lecture in Islington, H. W. Nettleship's efforts were rewarded with 'applause' for pictures of newly-inspected coal sacks and properly-weighted bread followed by 'a sigh of relief' as images of 'the horrors of slum life' gave way to portraits of 'commodious, healthy-looking County Council dwellings'. A query as to whether the Council's work should be stopped elicited 'a mighty shout of "No"'.⁴⁹ In Dulwich a Progressive lantern lecture was greeted with 'repeated cheers'.⁵⁰ Like the cinematograph with which the Progressives opened their campaign, lantern lectures enlivened a vibrant culture of public meetings in which theatricality was not new. Interaction between politicians and audiences was frequent in campaign gatherings, and politically mixed audiences were common. The *Daily News* lantern lecture was designed to enable speakers to leave out sections that lacked local resonance. Local newspapers applauded lantern lectures tailored to the locality, incorporating photographs of candidates.⁵¹ For the most part, though, lantern lectures, and cinematographs, followed a common template, reinforcing the core messages each side sought to communicate. It would, however, be wrong to see this as a purely technological phenomenon. London-wide issues predominated, but this reflected a political context in which the meaning of 'London', the nature of party identities, and the role of its Council were all fiercely contested.

The tangled relationship between 'old' and 'new', and between different forms of political expression, is nicely illustrated by the events of 'Reformer's Day', as the erstwhile Moderates sought to christen February 23rd. The *Municipal Reform Gazette* presented the

⁴⁹ *Islington Daily Gazette*, 28 January 1907, 5.

⁵⁰ *South London Press*, 19 January 1907.

⁵¹ *South London Press*, 16 February 1907.

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2
3 outdoor meetings held for the borough elections in 1906 as 'quite a new departure' for the
4
5 party, and as explicitly modelled on the methods of their opponents.⁵² Building on this
6
7 innovation, the highlight of Reformers' Day was to be a procession wending its way from
8
9 Islington Cattle Market to Trafalgar Square, culminating in a multi-platform open air meeting
10
11 in one of the traditional focal points for radical demonstrations. Much covered by the
12
13 illustrated press for which it provided irresistible material, the procession embraced
14
15 waggonettes, sandwich men, bands, banners, posters mounted on vans, and cars carrying
16
17 visualisations of Progressive policies, including a Golem-like figure holding the ratepayer in
18
19 his massive hand, a dilapidated LCC-built house, and a steam boat without passengers
20
21 bearing the legend 'One man, one boat'.⁵³ [fig. 3]
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53 ⁵² *Municipal Reform Gazette*, 21 February 1907.

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55 ⁵³ *Illustrated London News* (March 1907); *The Penny Illustrated Paper* and *Illustrated Times*, 2 March 1907;
56 Special Collections, University of Bristol, LCC Election Addresses, 1907, by permission of the University of
57 Bristol.
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The progress of these three-dimensional cartoons was far from smooth; the banners were torn, the house toppled, and the steamboat had one side ripped off. In what the *Daily Mail* described as a ‘riot’, it was clear, in keeping with the pattern of public meetings as a whole, that the Progressives won the fight, if not the election. Despite their use of megaphones, the Municipal Reformers struggled to gain a hearing, and the mile-long procession splintered on arrival at the square. The *Mail*’s riot was the Liberal *Manchester Guardian*’s ‘lively scenes’, while the Northern newspaper reported that the resolution - ‘this mass meeting of London ratepayers indignantly protests against the increasing burden on the rates caused by the Progressive-Socialist party, and pledges itself to every effort to turn the ‘Wastrels’ out...’ - was inaudible in spite of claims that it was carried.⁵⁴

The story of Reformers’ Day encapsulates the inter-penetration of ‘old’ and ‘new’ media, and the significance of public space, and media coverage. It gave rise to some controversy - revealingly not primarily about the low-level violence - but rather over payments to join the procession. The Progressive press seized upon this as emblematic of the Municipal Reformers’ lack of conviction and authenticity. Their opponents admitted that the ‘burly’ hod-carrying men had been paid, but argued their ‘wages’ were more generous than those offered by a Progressive council. Some on the anti-socialist right, notably Lawler Wilson, thought the demonstration a ‘fiasco’, in which ‘the scum of London were paid to demonstrate’, arguing it was the demise, rather than the satirical pretensions, of the procession which inspired laughter in the Square. Predictably, Lawler Wilson emphasised the effectiveness of the anti-socialist press over the following week in rebuilding the Municipal Reform campaign.⁵⁵ The *Mail* argued that the imagery of the procession did strike home,

⁵⁴ *Daily Mail*, 25 February 1907, 5; *Manchester Guardian*, 25 February, 1907, 8.

⁵⁵ W. Lawler Wilson, *The Menace of Socialism* (London, 1909), 22.

while arguing that the 'organised hooliganism' of Progressives revealed their desperation.⁵⁶

The meaning of Reformers Day was as contested as its spectacle was reproduced.

IV.

On 8 January 1907, the *Daily Mail* reported on the 'Opening of Wastrel Campaign'.⁵⁷ This headline was followed in the same month with, amongst others, 'Wastrel Docks / How to Ruin the Port of London', 'Mr Burns defends the Wastrels' and 'The Wastrel's Electric Trust'.⁵⁸ From January to February, the *Mail* relentlessly referred to 'Wastrels' rather than 'Progressives', while designating their opponents with the name they had chosen for themselves. The paper had hit upon this happy device in the run up to the borough elections of the previous year. In October 1906, it distinguished three political groupings in London - 'Progressives or Wastrels', 'Moderates or Municipal Reformers, whose cry is efficiency without extravagance' and 'Socialist-Labour'. By 9 November, pleased with how the term had caught on, the *Mail* dedicated an article to its etymology.⁵⁹

In late February 1907 Beatrice Webb wrote that 'the Harmsworth-Pearson gang are shovelling out money, using their daily and evening papers as great advertisement sheets...against the Progressives'.⁶⁰ The contribution of Harmsworth and Pearson papers to the fiscal controversy had already given them, especially on the left, a reputation for political

⁵⁶ *Daily Mail*, 25 February 1907, 5.

⁵⁷ *Daily Mail*, 8 January 1907, 4.

⁵⁸ *Daily Mail*, 14 January 1907; *Daily Mail*, 25 January 1907; *Daily Mail*, 29 January 1907.

⁵⁹ The *Mail* claimed credit for the Wastrels tag in *The Daily Mail and the Fight for London: A Handbook to the London County Council Election Giving Both Sides* (London, 1907), 5-6.

⁶⁰ Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie (eds) *The Diary of Beatrice Webb: volume 3, 1905-24* (London, 1984), 65-66. 65-66. For similar sentiments in print see, 'The Week', *The Speaker*, 19 January 1907, 460; 'Current Events', *The Independent Review* (February 1907), 128.

sloganeering.⁶¹ Webb was not, though, wrong to suggest that some newspapers ran an active and co-ordinated campaign against progressivism in 1907. The *Mail* dedicated the far right-hand column of page 4 to LCC stories from January to March, lending a spatial coherence to its unfolding narrative of progressive failings.⁶² The Harmsworth's *Evening News* assiduously propagated the Wastrel moniker, and W. K. Haselden pictured Wastrel profligacy in the pages of the *Daily Mirror*.⁶³

In the afterglow of victory, the *Mail* quoted N. W. Hubbard, one of the defeated Progressives in Norwood, accepting that the wastrel tag had 'caught on with the public'.⁶⁴ It was certainly a recurring motif in the contest, and occupied a central place in interpretations of its outcome as far away as New York.⁶⁵ The election address of Hubbard's opponents repeatedly referred to 'the Wastrels', as did that of Municipal Reformers Jocelyn Brandon and Edward Collins in Hammersmith.⁶⁶ By early January, the term had evidently achieved significant currency. It was used more commonly at public meetings than in election addresses. At the Islington branch of the recently founded Middle Class Defence League, Councillor Clarke complained of the 'the wastrel LCC' in connection to Progressive

⁶¹ Andrew S. Thompson, *Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics, c. 1880-1932* (Harlow, 2000), 61-81; Simon Potter, *News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System* (Oxford, 2003), 160-86.

⁶² The circulation of 'Fleet Street' papers was very high in London, and, especially before 1914, their coverage was centred on London, and the South East: Adrian Bingham, *Family newspapers? Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press 1918-78* (Oxford, 2009), 18; Tom Jeffery and Keith McClelland, 'A world fit to live in: the *Daily Mail* and the middle classes 1918-39', in James Curran, Anthony Smith and Pauline Wingate (eds), *Impacts and Influences: Media Power in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1987), 33.

⁶³ *London Evening News*, 10 January 1907; *Evening News*, 11 January 1907; *Evening News*, 12 January 1907; *Evening News* 15 January 1907; *Daily Mirror*, 14 February 1907; *Daily Mirror*, 15 February 1907; *Daily Mirror*, 16 February 1907; *Daily Mirror*, 28 February 1907; *Daily Mirror*, 2 March 1907. Haselden also pictured the LCC as a hungry pig, in 'The Municipal Pig and the Ratepayer', *Daily Mirror*, 6 December, 1906.

⁶⁴ *Daily Mail*, 4 March 1907.

⁶⁵ 'The Wastrels' Waterloo', *New York Tribune*, in *Municipal Journal*, 8 March 1907, 200.

⁶⁶ Special Collections, University of Bristol, LCC Election Addresses, C. U. Fisher & F. St John Morrow, 1907; Jocelyn Brandon and Edward Collins, 1907.

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3 dominance of the Works Committee.⁶⁷ Speaking at a Municipal Reform public meeting in
4 Islington, Councillor J. H. T. Keeves commended the policy from the borough elections of
5 fighting on the wastrel cry and the focus on the rates.⁶⁸ In the LCC itself, Sir Brooke-Hitching
6 defended the right's commitment to the municipal tramways by arguing they 'must be
7 managed, not by the wastrels, but by sound, shrewd business men'.⁶⁹ Progressives felt
8 compelled to respond explicitly to the wastrel indictment. At a Progressive meeting in
9 Kennington Baths, Sir John Benn demanded of his audience - 'Who, then, were the Wastrels?
10 ("The Moderates")'.⁷⁰ Seeking to defuse the charge, Benn later identified himself as a 'veteran
11 wastrel'.⁷¹ In general, Progressives aimed to downplay the scale of rate rises and the
12 precariousness of LCC's finances, while defending their expenditure.
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26 The 'wastrel' charge drew upon a traditional emphasis upon efficiency and
27 retrenchment. It was difficult to rebut in that few favoured waste. However, the term cast
28 Progressives as not simply the source of waste, but also as worthless, as indeed a form of
29 waste. Its use was not universal, but reflected differences of register within the press.⁷² It did
30 not figure in the pages of *The Times*, other than in reporting Progressive attempts to rebut it.
31 The *Municipal Reform Gazette* - one of the organs of the London Municipal Society - largely
32 eschewed the term. Some local newspapers that adopted a strongly pro-Municipal Reform
33 line in 1907 also avoided the tag.⁷³ This does not mean that these publications did not argue
34 that rates were too high, or that Progressive finance was wasteful. There were notable
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48 ⁶⁷ *Islington Daily Gazette*, 3 January 1907, 4.

49 ⁶⁸ *Islington Daily Gazette*, 17 January 1907, 5.

50 ⁶⁹ *Islington Daily Gazette*, 23 January 1907, 5.

51 ⁷⁰ *Islington Daily Gazette*, 28 January 1907, 4; *South London Press*, 19 January 1907.

52 ⁷¹ *South London Press*, 9 February 1907.

53 ⁷² Systematic counting of the number of uses in *The Times*, *Manchester Guardian*, *Daily Mail*, *South London*
54 *Press*, *Islington Daily Gazette*, *The Speaker*, *The Economist*, *Municipal Reform Gazette*.

55 ⁷³ For instance the *Islington Daily Gazette*.
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continuities in the messages conveyed by opponents of progressivism. It is, though, significant that the term ‘wastrel’ was chiefly propagated by the populist press of the right. The *Daily Mail*’s espousal of the term was a kind of ‘crusade’ that partook of its fondness for stunts, and for coining catchphrases.⁷⁴ Pointed terminology was not new: *The Times* called Liberals ‘separatists’ in 1895.⁷⁵ Like the paper as a whole, the more judgemental and vulgar ‘wastreles’ owed more, though, to the traditionally vituperative tone of the popular Sunday press, notably *Reynolds’s*.⁷⁶ The origins of ‘wastrel’ in this segment of the newspaper market helps explain its limited appearance in papers that aspired to greater respectability, while much of the local press sought to sustain a putative ‘non-political’ status that depended upon the disavowal of strident partisanship, though this was a complex and not always successful operation.

The ‘positive’ counterpart to the Wastrel cry was the replacement of ‘Moderate’ with ‘Municipal Reformer’ as the preferred self-designation of the political right. This too was essayed in the borough elections of November 1906. The liberal press detected the shift in nomenclature in September 1906, prior to the launch of the *Municipal Reform Gazette* the following month.⁷⁷ The new name was rapidly adopted in the press, though its unfamiliar and contested character is made apparent when a sympathetic local paper described the actor-manager George Alexander as ‘one of the Moderate, or Municipal Reform’ candidates.⁷⁸ By late October 1906, Captain Jessel, chair of the London Municipal Society, was already

⁷⁴ Jean Chalaby, ‘Northcliffe: Proprietor as Journalist’, in Peter Caterall, Colin Seymour-Ure and Adrian Smith (eds), *Northcliffe’s Legacy: Aspects of the Popular Press 1896-1996* (Basingstoke, 2000), 36-38.
⁷⁵ James Thompson, ‘Numeracy, electoral politics, and the visual culture of numbers’, in Glen O’Hara and Tom Crook (eds), *Statistics and the Public Sphere: Numbers and the People in modern Britain, c. 1800-2000* (Abingdon, 2011), 130.
⁷⁶ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London, 1961), 178, 195-8.
⁷⁷ *The Speaker*, 29 September 1906, 600.
⁷⁸ *Islington Daily Gazette*, 2 January, 5.

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3 rebutting criticism of the re-naming, claiming that Progressives were merely Radicals, and
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5 that 'Moderate' was not coined by the right. Jessel essentially acknowledged, however, the
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7 re-branding.⁷⁹ Through posters, cartoons, speeches and electoral addresses, the right sought to
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9 seize the mantle of municipal reform, appropriating the language adopted by the champions
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11 of London-wide government in the 1880s, much to their chagrin. This was a concerted
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13 strategy, designed to present a more attractive and dynamic image to voters. Neither of the
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15 two main groupings mapped precisely onto the cleavages of Westminster politics, and both
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17 purported to put municipal patriotism above conventional party divisions. Whereas the right
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19 had altered its name previously, 'Municipal Reformer' would endure through and beyond
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21 their long tenure in County Hall. The victories of November 1906 and March 1907
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23 consolidated its status as a winning formula.
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29 Progressives vigorously disputed the right's claim to the title of reformers. Most
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31 obviously, progressive politicians and publicists continued to refer to them as 'Moderates',
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33 denying that any transformation had occurred, and asserting that the right merely offered the
34
35 usual reactionary policies and aristocratic leadership. Progressives detected only 'so-called'
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37 Municipal Reform, as in the electoral addresses of Alex Glegg and John Kipling in Clapham,
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39 Henry Jephson and Walter Pope in North Kensington, and Frank Briant in North Lambeth.
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41 'Labour' and 'Independent Labour Party' candidates were similarly unimpressed.⁸⁰ In the
42
43 *Review of Reviews*, W. T. Stead bemoaned 'the set back to the cause of progress throughout
44
45 the whole country' that would be victory for the 'so-called "Municipal Reformers"'.⁸¹ Noting
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47 that 'the Tories of London believe in the value of a name' *The Speaker* compared them to
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53 ⁷⁹ *Municipal Reform Gazette*, 23 October 1906, 5.

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55 ⁸⁰ University of Bristol, LCC Election Addresses, Alex Glegg and John Kipling (Clapham), Henry Jephson and
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57 Walter Pope (North Kensington), Frank Briant (North Lambeth), W. T. Kelly (Peckham); London Metropolitan
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59 Archives, ACC/3606/1, Electoral Address of George Horne (Battersea) .

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⁸¹ *Review of Reviews* (March 1907), 233-4.

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3 ‘the simulated quick change artistes of the music halls’.⁸² Revealingly, it was the more
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5 pointed term ‘alias’ which Progressives most favoured. At a public meeting in Clerkenwell,
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7 the Marquis of Northampton observed that ‘our opponents are playing the old game under a
8
9 new name - an alias - and of aliases I am always a little suspicious’.⁸³ In an editorial the *Daily*
10
11 *Chronicle* referred to the ‘alias’ of Municipal Reform.⁸⁴ A. J. Shepherd and W. B. Yates in
12
13 Hackney deemed ‘the party hitherto known as the Moderates’ to now be ‘the party of many
14
15 *aliases*’.⁸⁵
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19 Visual media were ideally suited for making the case that Municipal Reformers were
20
21 guilty of disguising their true identity. In cartoons, posters, lantern slides and cinematographs,
22
23 Progressives presented their opponents hiding their true colours. Newspapers played the
24
25 leading role in this process. *Reynolds’s Newspaper* produced a poster, originally a cartoon,
26
27 showing Municipal Reform as the hut behind which the hunter ‘Capital’ lurked armed with
28
29 his net of ‘claptrap’ to catch innocent ratepayers.⁸⁶ The preeminent liberal cartoonist,
30
31 Carruthers Gould, tackled the theme in the *Westminster Gazette* through a Municipal Reform
32
33 bear that carries the ratepayer away, only to return, well fed, showing his true Moderate
34
35 markings.⁸⁷ ‘Artful Moderate Ruse Exposed’ encapsulated the argument [fig.4]. The
36
37 courtroom scene has ‘Vested Interests’/‘Trusts’ before the bar of ‘London Public Opinion’
38
39 while his various jackets - ‘Municipal Reform’, ‘Moderate’, ‘Unionist’ - are exposed, and
40
41 electors are urged not to be ‘led away by false names’. As with *The Speaker’s* music hall
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48 ⁸² *The Speaker*, 8 December 1906,

49 ⁸³ *Islington Daily Gazette*, 4 February 1907, 4.

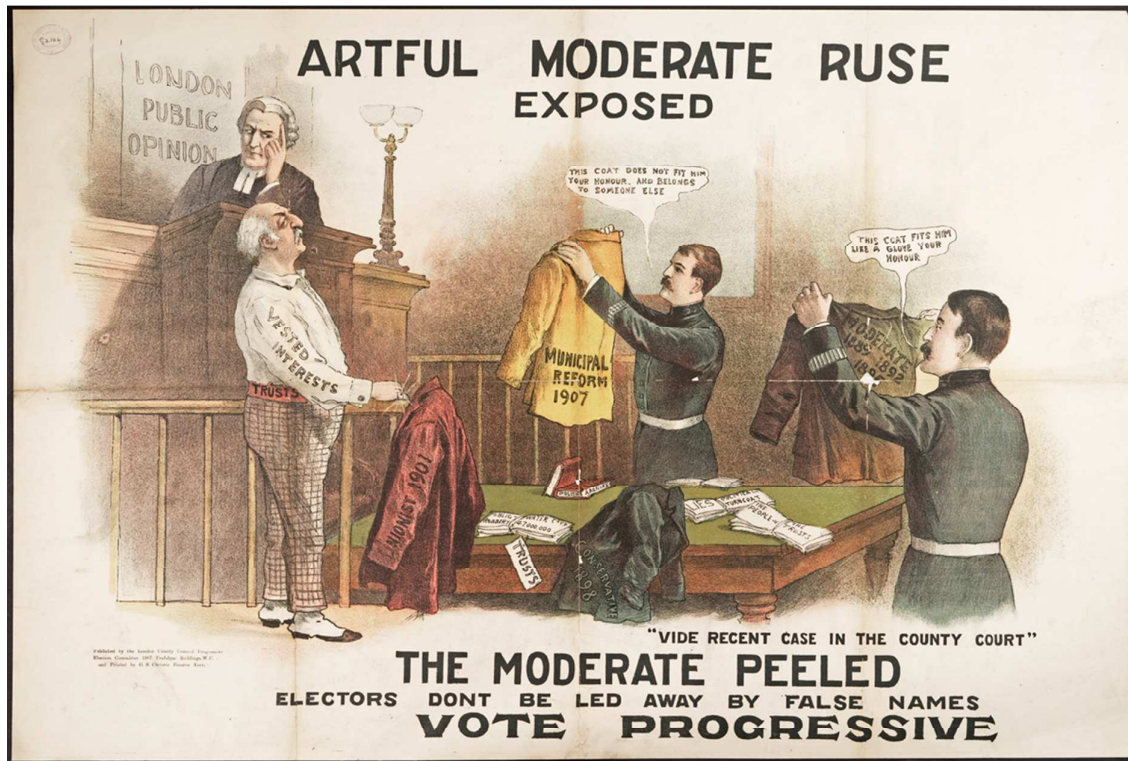
50 ⁸⁴ *Daily Chronicle*, 21 January 1907.

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52 ⁸⁵ University of Bristol, LCC Election Addresses, A. J. Shepherd and W. B. Yates (Hackney); Percy Harris
53 (Bethnal Green); H. Drysdale Woodcock (Holborn); Walter J. James & Victor R. Aronson (South Kensington).

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55 ⁸⁶ ‘Setting the Trap; or, Look Behind The Fence’, London School of Economics and Political Science, Coll.
56 Misc. 0840-1.

57
58 ⁸⁷ ‘The Silly Ratepayer of London’, reproduced in *Review of Reviews* (March 1907), 233.

comparison, this was very much a moral critique. The word 'alias', with its implications of dubiousness, even criminality, finds visual expression in the judicial backdrop, duly reinforced by the text.⁸⁸



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The closest equivalent amongst Municipal Reformers to the 'alias' accusation was the charge that 'Progressives' were actually 'Socialists'.⁸⁹ This was a constant refrain, adopted even by those who disdained the label 'Wastrel'. It was Huskinson's cartoons, heavily reproduced in newspapers, leaflets and posters, that constituted the most sustained attempt to fuse the terms 'Progressive' and 'Socialist', sometimes literally through hyphenation. In part, this reflected an established tendency amongst convinced anti-socialists to identify municipal activism as socialist, enflamed by anxieties about the implications for London of the Liberal landslide of

⁸⁸ 'Artful Moderate Ruse Exposed', Coll. Misc. 0840-10, by permission of the London School of Economics.

⁸⁹ On 'Labour-Socialist' in the 1920s, Laura Beers, *Your Britain: Media and the Making of the Labour Party* (Cambridge, Ma, 2010), 56.

1906. Name-calling, and rows over nomenclature, were scarcely confined to 1907. However, the intensity of the conflict was both unusual and significant at this election.

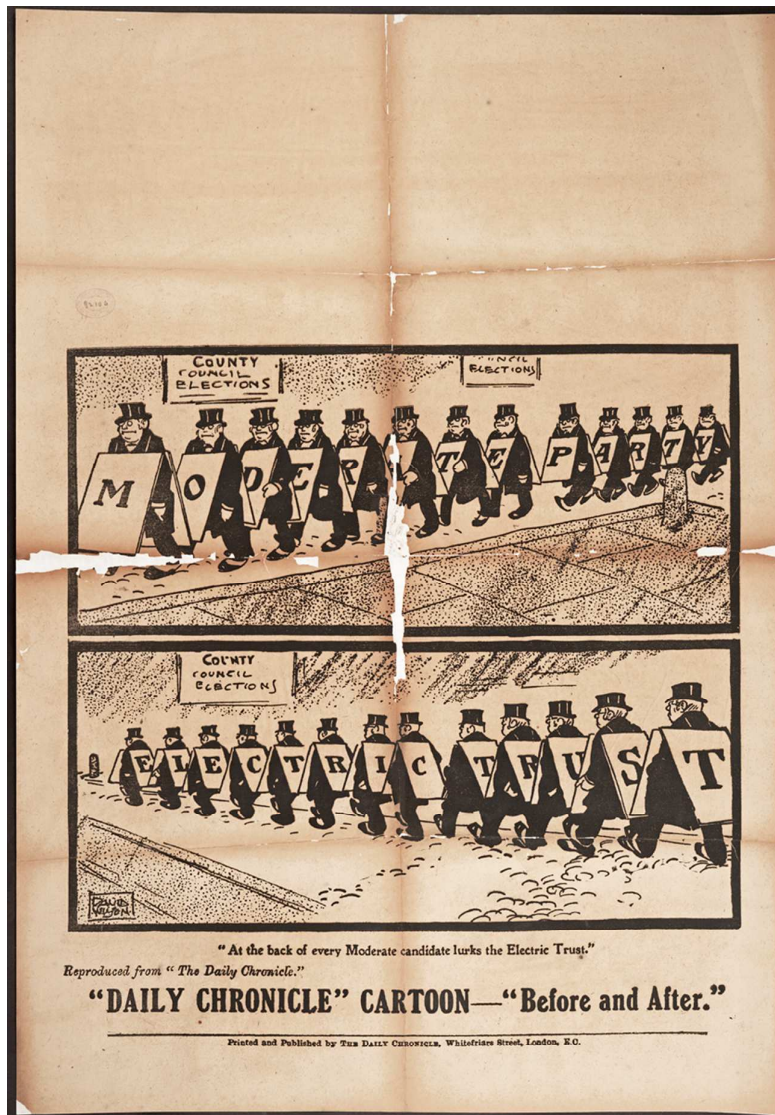
The battle over names was driven by the need on both sides to forge viable coalitions of support from potentially divergent factions. Its ferocity owed much to the heightened ideological temperature of the Edwardian era, the emergence of a Labour party in parliament, and the aftermath of the controversies over electoral conduct in the recent general election. In its analogies with the music hall and its discourse of deception, the textual and visual language of denunciation recurred to questions of truth, appearances and identity. Such anxieties may reflect concerns about authenticity that historians have argued were widespread amidst the bustling anonymity of London life.⁹⁰ The degree of anger articulated by some Progressives over their opponents' self-descriptions seems to embody a sense that a hard-won political tradition and identity was being purloined.⁹¹

The contest over meaning in 1907 was not confined to party labels. In an image borrowing from the world of London theatre, one Progressive poster pictured identifiable Municipal Reformers riding on the shark of the Trusts. The *Daily Chronicle* cartoonist David Wilson repeatedly portrayed the 'Moderates' as the vehicle for the Trusts, as in the posters 'The Moderate Trio' and 'Before and After'[fig.5].⁹²

⁹⁰Deborah Cohen, 'Who was who? Race and Jews in turn-of-the-century Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 41 (2002), 460-83; Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London, 1992), 37-8, 127-8; Judith R. Walkowitz, *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (New Haven, 2012), 39.

⁹¹ John Lloyd, *London Municipal Government. A History of A Great Reform* (London, 1910), ix; Jephson, *Making of Modern London*.

⁹² 'Before and After' and 'The Moderate Trio', Wallas Papers. 'Before And After', Coll. Misc. 0840-10, by permission of the London School of Economics.



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Progressives made the claim that Municipal Reform policy favoured private companies over the public good central to their campaign. William Davies argued in his Battersea electoral address that Municipal Reformers were 'threatening to hand London over to the companies and trusts'. Edwin A. Cornwall and Edward Smith warned in Bethnal Green of the danger of a 'huge Electric Monopoly'.⁹³ H. J. Glanville, giving a limelight lecture in Highgate courtesy of the *Daily News*, asked 'Were trusts to be allowed to come in next March?', urging that a

⁹³ Electoral Addresses, William Davies, Edwin A. Cornwall and Edward Smith.

Moderate majority would lead to ‘great rejoicing in the camp of the electric trust’.⁹⁴ Through oratory, leaflets, editorials, posters, lantern slides and cinematographs, the Progressives contended that a Municipal Reform victory would deliver key services, especially electricity, into the hands of private monopolies.

Unsurprisingly, their opponents denied the charge that they were the tools of vested interests. More interestingly, and more significantly, they argued that it was in fact the Progressives who aimed to create in the words of *The Referee* a ‘huge Municipal Trust’, or what the *Property Owner’s Journal* memorably termed ‘the electric octopus’.⁹⁵ In their Bethnal Green electoral address Lionel H. Lemon and Richard A. Robinson accused the Progressives of seeking to create a ‘great Municipal Electricity Trust’.⁹⁶ Communicated via a wide range of media from speeches to lantern slides, the core message was nicely encapsulated in a poster by Huskinson showing a ratepayer electrocuted by ‘The Progressive Socialist Electrical Trust’.⁹⁷ The *Daily Mail* was to the fore in attacking ‘The Wastrel’s Electric Trust’.⁹⁸ Anti-trust rhetoric was not limited to its reporting of the LCC, but was also apparent in coverage of the coal and rail industries, while the paper touted its earlier role in attacking the Soap Trust. This was in keeping with its efforts to articulate a consumer interest, but the extent and ferocity of its anti-trust rhetoric has been insufficiently acknowledged, as has the broader currency of such language. In its leaflets, the LMS likewise argued that the only trusts in the country ‘have been almost entirely the work of leading members of the Radical-Progressive Party’.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ *Islington Daily Gazette*, 8 January 1907, 5.

⁹⁵ *The Referee*, 13 January 1907; *Property Owner’s Journal* (March 1907), 1.

⁹⁶ Electoral Addresses, Lionel H. Lemon and Richard A. Robinson.

⁹⁷ Edward Huskinson, ‘The Progressive Socialist Electrical Trust’, Guildhall Library, London.

⁹⁸ *Daily Mail*, 29 January 1907.

⁹⁹ LMS, ‘Reasons why you should oppose the Progressives and support the Municipal Reformers’ (1907).

Progressives aimed to put the trust question at the heart of the battle, not least in order to move the conversation away from rates and finances. The Municipal Reform strategy of turning the Progressives' preferred issue against them reflects the sophistication and vigour of Edwardian electioneering. It remains, though, to explain why both sides regarded the trust label as so damaging. As Frank Trentmann has noted, free traders argued in 1906 that tariff reform would create and reward monopolies, damaging the interests of consumers, and debasing politics.¹⁰⁰ The spectre of corruption was frequently invoked in, and after, the 1907 election. Trusts were closely associated with the United States, and with political graft. The trust allegation was also an accusation of Americanising city government, designed to conjure up images of Tammany Hall. The charge was frequently made explicit. In setting out the Municipal Reform case, Jessel claimed that 'the Socialistic policy of the Progressives tends to create a second Tammany Hall, and to produce in London a state of sordid political corruption similar to that rampant in New York'.¹⁰¹ In contrast the *Daily Chronicle* held that the phenomenon of Tammany Hall flourished in the absence rather than the presence of municipal ownership.¹⁰² The Trust debate encapsulated the battle over civic patriotism, good governance, and political truth-telling.

V.

In *Human Nature in Politics*, Graham Wallas pondered the last half hour before the polls closed in the 1907 LCC election. He had spent the time at a polling station viewing proceedings and 'thinking of this book'. Wallas recorded the 'dazed', and 'bewildered' state of these citizens, 'snatched' from work or the pub on a Saturday night. He observed that

¹⁰⁰ Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 2008), 65.

¹⁰¹ Jessel, *The Daily Mail and the Fight for London*, 12.

¹⁰² *Daily Chronicle*, 21 January 1907.

‘about half of them were women’.¹⁰³ Wallas was far from unique in being struck by the role of women in 1907: assessments of their behaviour were central to the way in which the election came to be understood. *The Nation* proclaimed that ‘the outstanding feature of nearly every contest appears to have been that the women gave a heavy and an almost solid vote for the Moderate Reformers’.¹⁰⁴ The Liberal MP J. W. Cleland attributed ‘the result at Lewisham to the fact that the Moderates were able to poll nearly the whole number of women voters, some 4,000 in number’.¹⁰⁵ The Primrose Leaguer Lady Knightley Fawsley confided in her journal that ‘the Progressives think the women voters had a good deal to do with their defeat for the County Council’.¹⁰⁶ The *Municipal Reform Gazette* claimed that whereas normally only 10% of female electors voted, more than half had done so, before remarking that ‘the Progressives even attribute their defeat to the women voters’.¹⁰⁷

Progressive analysts essayed a range of explanations for defeat beyond the alleged actions of female voters. The ‘immense increase in the polls’ was central to these, with the *Manchester Guardian* identifying ‘stay-at-home men’ as the source of anti-Progressive votes.¹⁰⁸ The role played by divisions on the left, whether between liberals and socialists, or between non-conformists and progressives, was debated. It was, though, the ‘American’-style anti-progressive campaign waged by newspapers and political associations that was widely seen as crucial. While the political right unsurprisingly differed in its assessment of the morality of its efforts, and stressed the iniquities of progressive rule, it largely shared the view that its electioneering had been highly effective. In an interview with the *Globe* headlined ‘Tammany’s Downfall’, the London Municipal Society Secretary W. G. Towler

¹⁰³ Wallas, *Human Nature*, 229.

¹⁰⁴ *The Nation*, 9 March 1907, 58.

¹⁰⁵ *The Tribune*, 4 March 1907.

¹⁰⁶ Peter Gordon (ed.), *Politics and Society - The Journals of Lady Knightley Fawsley* (London, 2005).

¹⁰⁷ *Municipal Reform Gazette*, 7 March 1907, 6.

¹⁰⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 4 March 1907.

suggested of 'It's Your Money We Want' in particular that its 'effect...on much of the public has been great'. The *Daily Mail* suggested it was 'the unanimity of the reasoning portion of the Press, backed by the admirable organisation which Captain Jessel and Mr Towler have so ably and brilliantly conducted' that had delivered victory.¹⁰⁹

The evidential basis for these analyses was shaky, given uncertainties created by the rise in turnout. Many Progressive defeats were narrow, and, as some contemporary commentators, noted, the loss of candidates and energy to parliamentary duties resulting from the 1906 triumph was likely not to have helped. The campaign run by the right was stronger than its predecessors. The timing of the election was certainly propitious, and divisions on the left helped. The right was able to construct the election as a verdict on financial crisis and administrative competence, despite economic circumstances that were less clear cut than those of the early 1920s or the 1970s.

The emphasis upon novel 'American' methods, present in the immediate post-election coverage, received canonical expression in Wallas's masterpiece, which can be seen as the most sophisticated expression of the progressive reaction to the 1907 defeat. Much as 'It's Your Money We Want' was the key instance of the transferable power of pictorial imagery, so the *Daily Mail*'s use of 'wastrel' served to illustrate the potency of repetitive sloganeering. The focus on the rates, and the multi-media publicity onslaught, held by the right to have secured success, provided its model in future LCC contests and empowered those on the right keen to politicise further local government.¹¹⁰ Informed by a sense that the emphasis upon good budgetary housekeeping worked well with female electors, the right's understanding of 1907 influenced its post-war thinking, when a changed tax environment, along with an

¹⁰⁹ *Daily Mail*, 4 March 1907.

¹¹⁰ Jones, *Borough Politics*.

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3 altered electorate, made the lessons of London more generally applicable.¹¹¹ The 1907
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5 election demonstrated that new forms of political communication, and more coherent and
6
7 organised messaging, could be pioneered in a municipal context, prior to the intense party
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9 conflict of 1908-1914.
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13 Wallas offered a dazzling account of the process of transference and allusion whereby
14
15 images gained meaning. Less apparent, though, was a full recognition of the range of media -
16
17 from electoral addresses and newspaper cartoons, to posters, cinematographs and lantern
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19 lectures - that constituted the visual culture of London politics. Relying overly on Wallas's
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21 participant account distracts from the inter-relationship between different media, much as his
22
23 emphasis on the sub-conscious power of the iconic image neglects the active role of political
24
25 audiences in creating and contesting meanings. New media before 1914 enriched rather than
26
27 replaced existing forms of public politics. As David Wilson's 'Before And After' portrays,
28
29 visual media were incorporated into the battle over symbolic space; 'new' and 'old' media
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31 and campaigning techniques were inter-mingled, as in the Reformers' Day march to Trafalgar
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33 Square.¹¹² The referencing of images within images, and the frequent attention to questions of
34
35 pictorial lying, reveal the self-conscious sophistication of pre-1914 political culture. The
36
37 appeal to the viewer, or listener, was one firmly based upon interaction, in which the voter
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39 was enlisted into the construction of meaning as a knowing citizen, able to discern the
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41 duplicities of the other side. If not politics as art, this was politics as music hall.¹¹³ Most of
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50 ¹¹¹ David Jarvis, 'Mrs Maggs and Betty: the Conservative appeal to women voters in the 1920s', *Twentieth*
51 *Century British History*, 5 (1994), 129-52; David Jarvis, 'The Conservative Party and the politics of gender,
52 1900-1939', in Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (eds), *The Conservatives and British Society,*
53 *1880-1990* (Cardiff, 1996), 172-193; Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-war*
54 *Britain* (Oxford, 2004), 111-145.
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56 ¹¹² David Wilson, 'Before and After', Wallas Papers, LSE.

57 ¹¹³ Tom Laquer, 'The Queen Caroline Affair: Politics as Art in the Reign of George IV', *Journal of Modern*
58 *History*, 54 (1982), 417-466
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all, what 1907 shows is that Edwardian political culture can only be fully understood through critical engagement with both the word and the image.

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